

Testimony of Sue Smith, President, League of Women Voters of Michigan

**Before the Michigan Senate
Local Government and Elections Committee
November 9, 2011**

Good afternoon. My name is Sue Smith and I am the President of the League of Women Voters of Michigan. I would like to take this opportunity to express our opposition to SB 751.

The League of Women Voters believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. The League has long supported policies that protect the integrity of the voting process.

However, the League believes that measures to improve election administration should be evaluated in terms of their necessity, their costs, and how they affect voters' rights. I want to specifically address the requirements pertaining to voter identification.

*** The photo ID requirement is not necessary.**

The Qualified Voter File is currently used to verify the identity of a person applying for an absentee ballot. People who vote absentee by mail will continue to have their identity verified by signature whereas, under SB 751, those who apply in person will have to show ID. The bill creates two classes of absentee voters.

Photo ID laws address impersonation of another registered voter at the polls, which is an exceedingly rare form of voter fraud. Numerous studies have found that those rare cases of voter impersonation that do occur, rarely could have been prevented by a photo identification law.

*** The law will be costly to implement.** Other states that have implemented photo ID laws have had to spend millions to educate voters about the requirements, to provide ID to those who cannot afford it, to re-train elections officials, and to defend legal challenges.

- * **The proposed law puts up a barrier to those citizens who want to vote, but who don't have the necessary identification.** While it is true, that in Michigan citizens may sign an affidavit in lieu of providing identification, this fact is not publicized by the Secretary of State nor other election officials. Many qualified voters who do not have photo IDs may stay home, not knowing that signing an affidavit is an option.

The League of Women Voters agrees that voting should be fair and safe, but erecting unnecessary barriers to voting, such as requiring photo ID, is not fair and is not needed for voting to be safe.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.